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F O R T U N E S W A S H E D A W A Y

"BLACK BLIZZARDS"

Broadcast No. 41 in a series
of discussions of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

February 4, 1939 6:45-7:00 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

The Old Southwest has long been the theme for romantic ballads, and the exploits of legendary characters of the Texas Panhandle have enriched American literature since the early days of the famed Goodnight and Chisholm cattle trains. Romance, adventure, a land of opportunity, as depicted in the East and Midwest by poem and by song, by books and by word of mouth, caused many men to gamble on the unknown country. In 1899, Jim Ford and his bride left Kentucky to share together whatever joys or sorrows, successes or failures, this new land might hold in store. There was a scarcity of ranch hands when they stepped down from the train at the little cow town of Dalhart, Texas...

SOUND: Train chugging in background.

DONAVAN

Donavan's the name, stranger. Foreman down on the XIT ranch.
Are yu lookin' for work?

FORD

Sure are, Mr. Donovan. Ford's my name. This is my wife Mary.

MARY

Pleased t' meetcha.

DONAVAN (heartily)

How are yu, Mary?

FORD

We just got married back in Kentucky.

DONAVAN

Fine! Fine! But we've got no time for things sentimental. We've got work to do. Let's get going.

ORGAN: CHISHOLM TRAIL.

ANNOUNCER

Jim Ford's abrupt introduction to the Texas Panhandle was typical of its time. Men were busy, for a new country was in the making. If Sam Donovan from the XIT had not spied Jim and Mary, another rancher would have bid for their services--for there was work for all, and the only qualifications were a strong physique and a willingness to work. Jim Ford and his wife accepted the habits and customs of their new environment, and within two years...

DONAVAN

You're a fine boy, Jim, and I hate to lose yu. But ever' man wants a home, and I'm proud uv yu, my boy, for wantin' to start out on your own so soon.

FORD

Thanks, Sam. I sure hate to leave, but Mary and me 'ave talked it over, and we want to be in our own house when the little one comes. We figger that with the two sections of land and with our little bunch of whitefaces we can make a go of it.

DONAVAN

I'm sure yu can, my boy. This is a great country, and a young man like you has a great future. We'll all be expectin' the best from yu.

ORGAN: HOME ON THE RANGE.

ANNOUNCER

And old Sam Donovan, had he lived, would not have been disappointed. Jim Ford and his wife were intelligent and ambitious. Within two years they increased their holdings, continued raising cattle on the open range. Then came the decade from 1910 to 1920. War scourged the world. The cry came, "Wheat will win the war!" Jim Ford watched his neighbors plow up their grazing land, watched them plow up the sod. They kept their heads as their Panhandle suddenly became topsy-turvy, until 1926, when...

SOUND: Threshing machine.

THRESHER (fading in)

Yep, Mr. Ford, it's goin' to make 25 or 30 bushel to the acre, sure as shootin'. Just think of all these years you've wasted by stickin' to your old whitefaces instead of makin' yourself a rich man with wheat.

FORD

Well, I wonder, sometimes...

THRESHER

Let's see. At \$1.20 a bushel your first crop will bring you... let's figger a minute... 320 acres, times 25 bushel to th' acre makes... 8,000 bushels! Then 8,000 times \$1.20 is (whistles) nearly ten thousand dollars! I guess I'd better start raisin' wheat myself, instead uv threshin' it for you other fellows.

FORD

Yeah, that does make your threshin' business and my cow business look a little bad. But I dunno. I can't help but feel that some-thin's not right about it. Makin' that much money so easy don't seem quite right to me. You may not get rich right away off of cows, but they're mighty dependable.

THRESHER

Aw, fergit it. You're really goin' t' be on easy street now. Wouldn't surprise me none if you buy yourself a combine or two and cut me out of my threshin' job next year.

FORD

Oh, I dunno...

THRESHER

But that's all right. I'm mighty happy to see you and Mary and the kids git what's acomin' to yu...

ORGAN: HOME ON THE RANGE.

ANNOUNCER

So Jim Ford did what many of his neighbors had already done. He broke the plains, bought a combine. But something happened. The average yield for the first six years was only 10 bushels per acre--barely enough to pay for cost of production. Then came 1932--drought, and the next year, more drought. And in 1934, dust storms--black blizzards!

SOUND: Heavy windstorm. (Make it whistle, windows rattling, occasional pebbles striking the building, etc.)

MARY

Jim, I've swept out sand today until I'm about worn out. I wonder if we hadn't ought to pull up stakes and call it quits.

FORD

Well, there's one thing sure, mama, we can't last much longer. It's only because of our good friends in town who've 'lowed us credit that we haven't had to move on long before now.

MARY

But the ones left are about on the rocks themselves now.

FORD

I know. Mr. Cole says he's thru with the implement business this year unless somethin' happens. An' I don't see how old man Carney can stick with his grocery store much longer.

MARY

It almost makes me want to cry to think of the time and money we've spent on this place, and to look at it now. Just think of those fine trees we had growin' all around the place--and those shrubs! They really made it the best lookin' farmhouse in the Panhandle.

FORD

Yeah. Before the dust got to blowin' so bad this morning, I got to diggin' around the house a little, and you know, I found the tops of them purty lookin' spreadin' evergreens--three and a half feet under the sand.

MARY

I know. I was talking to Mrs. Harris at the store yesterday. She said that her sister who lives over in another county said her husband had worked better'n a week, just cleanin' the sand and dirt away from the house.

FORD

Wonder what he's doin' that for. It'll blow right back in.

MARY

Well, Mrs. Harris says that some government man is supposed to be showin' her sister's husband how to keep it from comin' back. Scientific farmin', she says her sister calls it. He's plannin' to do a lot of other things, too, but Mrs. Harris didn't know much about it--somethin' about crooked rows and...

FORD

I'll bet that's the guy the preacher was tellin' me about last week. The preacher seemed to think that whatever it is the government man is doin' is a good thing--that he's goin' to help a lot in saving the soil.

MARY

Well, he'd better hurry, or they won't be anyone left here to use the soil when it is saved.

FORD

You know, Mary, I have a notion to find out about that man and see what he's doin'. We've got to do somethin' and do it soon. Not so much for us, I'm thinkin' about, but the kids. They've got to have a chance.

MARY

I guess we can hold out for a while longer. There's one thing sure, the dust can't get any worse.

FORD

Well, I know what I'm going to do.

SOUND: Man rings rural-type telephone.

FORD

I'm goin' to call the county agent.

ORGAN: HOME ON THE RANGE.

ANNOUNCER

With the county agent, Jim Ford visited Dallam County, where the first soil conservation work in the Dust Bowl was being started. After careful observation, these two practical men started to experiment on the Ford farm that spring and summer. Meanwhile, they interested others in what they were doing, and through community effort secured a demonstration area in their own county. Weather conditions remained about the same for the next few years, but Jim Ford gained new hope...

FORD

Well, mama, it was just four years ago tonight that you and I decided to give ourselves one more chance. And the kids are all gone again tonight, just as they were that evenin'.

MARY

We don't often have an evenin' to ourselves, Jim. I reckon it does us good to take stock of ourselves once in a while.

FORD

It sure does, and Mary, you know, I'm proud o' what we've done the last four years.

MARY

And so am I. I'll never believe that old sayin' again about not bein' able to teach an old dog new tricks. Take that terraced field. Those feed crop yields on that land prove the sayin' is untrue.

FORD

Yes, I never would have thought we could get trees to grow again after lookin' at that sand piled up all around the buildin's.

Remember?

MARY

Yes...even the water trough was completely covered with sand.

FORD

And now we have Chinese elm, and locust trees growin' everywhere they're needed.

MARY

Well, we've learned our lesson the hard way, but now we know a lot more than we did before the experience. Now that we know how to farm on the contour, how to grow feed crops with just a little rain, and how to grow trees, and how to keep the soil from leavin' the fields or coverin' them every time the wind blows, we can really make our livestock pay.

FORD

We sure can. Of course, we need a little more pasture for the cattle and hogs--not to mention your hens--and we need to get a little more feed stored up ahead, but we'll gradually work that out, mama.

MARY

Sure we will, Jim. And have you noticed the children are again taking interest in the farm. Let's give thanks.

ORGAN: HOME ON THE RANGE.

ANNOUNCER

Jim and Mary Ford, like thousands of other farmers who have learned how to save their windswept fields through soil conservation methods, give thanks. And the entire nation gives thanks for the pluck, and the courage, of the men who are re-making the West. And as their efforts expand, black blizzards, black clouds of dust rolling from the plains to the Atlantic, meet their master.

ORGAN: HOME ON THE RANGE.

ANNOUNCER

And now, here is Ewing Jones, of the Dayton, Ohio, office of the Soil Conservation Service. Ewing, it hasn't been so many years when we received dust from the Great Plains right here in Cincinnati. It's encouraging to know that these disheartening storms can be controlled, or lessened at any rate.

JONES

It certainly is, _____. And you're right when you say that they're disheartening. I know from experience. Water erosion, such as we have here in the Ohio Valley, is really far more serious. But when drought strikes hard, year after year, and your soil rises up to choke and ruin you, you can't help but get that indescribable feeling of doom.

ANNOUNCER

But these storms are being abated in many cases.

JONES

That's the report from our regional office at Amarillo, Texas. It reports that today, with an ever increasing use of soil and water conservation practices, the area where black blizzards and dust storms originate has shrunk to one-third of its former size. Moisture conditions have been improving during the last year, and January rains and snows were the heaviest in many years. Prospects for good wheat and feed crops are excellent, especially in those areas protected by conservation measures. And if a protective cover is restored to the fields, dust storms soon may be all but forgotten.

ANNOUNCER

And what measures are being used to control wind erosion out there? That is, how do they compare with the ones being demonstrated by the Soil Conservation Service in the East and Midwest?

JONES

A lot of them are very much like those around here. In this part of the country, soil erosion control measures are designed to slow up the movement of water, so that it will soak into the ground. Or, in the event of excess rainfall, to conduct it slowly from the fields and to keep the land covered with protective vegetation or crop residues during those seasons when soil blowing or washing are most likely to occur.

ANNOUNCER

And control measures in the Great Plains are designed to retain the moisture and make all of it soak in.

JONES

That's right. Strip cropping, contour tillage, use of crop residues, terracing--these are a few that are being demonstrated by the Service out there, just as they are in the Ohio Valley. The land out there is deep and rich over tremendous areas. It is flat. It is cheap. It isn't subject to soil acidity. And the people have courage. No, don't count the Great Plains out.

ANNOUNCER

This story of the fight back of the Great Plains has come through the cooperation of the Dayton, Ohio, and Amarillo, Texas, offices of the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. Next week, Star Farmer of America...

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SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the agriculture
department of the Nation's Station.

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